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SOME DIFFICULTIES IN COLONIAL GOVERNMENT ENCOUNTERED BY GREAT BRITAIN AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN MET

BY THE RIGHT HONORABLE JAMES BRYCE,
Ambassador from Great Britain to the United States.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I thank you very much for the cordial reception you have been kind enough to give me. I also thank Mr. Smith for the very friendly words which he has been good enough to say regarding me.

I deem it a great honor to be asked to speak to you, but I also feel, on this occasion, no small measure of distrust and timidity because, in the first place, I did not come prepared to address such a meeting as this. This hall reminds me of one of our great meetings in England on the eve of a general election. When I was invited to offer some introductory remarks on the subject of colonial policy, I imagined to myself a small room, with about twenty-five to thirty gentlemen, mostly elderly gentlemen, and mostly with spectacles, ex-officials and professors in the college, and I thought that we were going to have a little quiet discussion about colonial administration, which I was expected to introduce by saying a few words. I assure you that, although I feel honored by seeing such an audience as this, I am sorry that I have brought nothing worthy of so large a gathering, and when I give you the few trite remarks I have to make, you will understand that I put them together in my own mind for an audience very different from this.

I have another reason for being a little unquiet. I have read a headline in regard to some remarks I offered yesterday at a dinner, suggesting that I expressed doubts whether the Declaration of Independence was a wise act. Ladies and gentlemen—heaven forbid that I should express a doubt or any opinion at all, on that subject! I cannot conceive any question less profitable to discuss at this present day. What I did do was to invite the guests at that dinner to follow me into a speculation as to what would have happened if the Declaration had not been signed, also a speculative question, but possessing some interest.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, when I come to this subject which brings us together this evening, let me first say that I have no right whatever to offer any opinion upon American policy. I am not here to do anything of that kind. I am only here at the request of the directors of this learned body to kick the ball off by making a few remarks on the colonial experience which we in Great Britain have had. We have now had a pretty long experience. It began, curiously enough, three hundred years ago this year—it began with the settlement of Jamestown in Virginia. Well, part of that earlier experience of ours was not altogether fortunate. I am not going to go into painful details of the mistakes which were made, and the results which followed those mistakes. I will only ask you to believe that certain events which happened at this time led us to believe that we were capable of sometimes erring in our colonial policy. Like sensible men, we drew upon our experience, and when we had a new set of colonies we began upon new and better principles.

Our colonies are now in two classes, those called the self-governing and those called the Crown colonies. The self-governing colonies are those which contain a European population which allows of self-government. We have two groups—the North American group, the Australian group (which consists of the states of the Commonwealth of Australia), the detached colony of New Zealand, the detached colony of Newfoundland, and the South African group, not federated, consisting of Cape Colony and the Transvaal (to which it is proposed to add the Orange River territory). These are all democratic states. We have given every one a legislature. That legislature has complete power of passing statutes which govern the colonies. Each has a responsible government, consisting of a body of ministers who hold office at the pleasure of the legislature, according to what we call the responsible cabinet system, and by whom the government is conducted. The governor is sent by the Crown, but he is only a formal representative of the Crown, and the responsibility rests with the responsible minister who works with the legislature. We allow the most complete freedom to these colonial legislatures. Although we retain, in theory, the power of vetoing their legislation, in practice we scarcely ever do so, and when we do, it is only in those extremely

few cases in which some law passed by the colony may conflict with the interests of some other part of the British empire, or where it would conflict with some international obligation undertaken by treaty. In all such cases, of course, we could not allow the single colony to break an obligation incurred on behalf of the whole empire by the general imperial parliament. We find this system of self-governing colonies to work, on the whole, very smoothly indeed.

The colonies pass the legislation which they find best for their local condition. They do not interfere with us and we do not interfere with them. In practice, very little friction occurs, and we attribute the success of this system to the completeness with which we have carried out our principle of allowing the local legislature to manage all the local concerns. We have gone so far in our belief in the value of self-government, that in the last few months we have given a local legislature and a local responsible ministry to the Transvaal, which was at war with Great Britain only a few years ago, and the prime minister of that colony has now come to England with the prime ministers of the other colonies, in order to deliberate there with the London colonial office upon affairs relating to the general welfare of the British empire.

It is suggested that in some respects we might make a more close connection with the colonies. It has been suggested that there might be a council which would make arrangements for the common imperial defense by land and sea, and for contributions for that purpose. Those are questions which we are considering in conjunction with the colonies, but it is no part of our intention to press any such scheme as that upon the colonies. Whatever is done must be done by and with the free consent and approval of the colonies. It is a great proof of the value of the principles of liberty and local self-government, to which we in England and to which the British population of the whole empire attach so much importance, that under this system the colonies have become more and more attached to the mother country, and the mother country has become more and more interested in the colonies. There never was a time when all the British colonies were more devoted in heart and mind to the interests of the whole British people, and

when we had stronger prospects that these sentiments of affection would continue to unite these scattered lands.

The other set of colonies consists of those which we call Crown colonies. They exist in countries where the natives, not of European origin, form the bulk of the population, and where we deem that this native population is not qualified by its racial characteristics and by its state of education and enlightenment to work self-governing institutions. The largest instance—we do not call it a colony, but its government is practically government of that character—is the Empire of India, with hundreds of millions of people, which is administered as a great separate dependency. In addition we have a large number of other colonies scattered over the world, some in West Africa, in South Africa, and in East Africa; some in the Indian Archipelago, some in the West Indies, some in the Pacific Ocean, and some in the Indian Ocean. It would take too long to name them all. The distinctive feature of nearly all these colonies (I do not say of all, for there are few exceptions) is that in them the great majority of the population is not deemed to be fit to govern itself by a legislature and a responsible ministry. These colonies are governed in different ways. Some of them have a council composed partly of elected, partly of nominated, members; some have a council entirely composed of nominated members; some have a smaller council, in which there are a few nominees, who along with the executive officers surround the governor. The arrangements are in each case made with regard to the proportion of persons inhabiting the colony who are of European birth, or with regard to the number of well-educated natives who are fit to be trusted with the election of members to the council. Where there is such a population the council is largely elective. Where there is not, the council is nominated. We believe these councils valuable because they furnish an organ through which local opinion is able to express itself; but still it is generally true that the governing power in these Crown colonies rests with the governor, and he himself is under the orders of the Colonial Office, and the Colonial Office is responsible to the British Parliament, so that if any grievance arises in the colony which the governor on the spot does not redress, it is open to the person who considers himself aggrieved to forward a memorial to

the Colonial Office, which will investigate it, and if the Colonial Office does not give to the aggrieved person what he considers to be satisfaction, then he can communicate with some member of the House of Commons, and get the question raised there. Accordingly, the fact that the governor exercises wide power in these colonies does not make him irresponsible, or deprive a colonial subject of liberties, because he has the power at any time to make complaint to the Colonial Office or to Parliament.

The principles which we have applied in the government of these colonies can be stated to you only in the briefest way. It would take much too long to explain them fully in so large a meeting as this. I will, however, enumerate some of the most important. One of these principles is that we give to every British subject, wherever he lives, whatever his education, or color, or religion—we give him absolutely equal civil rights. (Applause.) He is just as much under the protection of the law as a native-born Englishman in England. He has the same right to go into the courts and insist on any claim he makes being heard. He has the right of *habeas corpus*, and all the other civil rights guaranteed by our constitution. Those are given to every subject of the Crown. It is an interesting fact that any British subject can be placed by the Crown in any post of the public service. Any native of India may be elected to the House of Commons, and might be sent by the Crown to the House of Lords. We have had two instances of natives of India elected as members of the House of Commons by London constituencies. They sat there and took part in debates just the same as any other members. You know that with us a man may be elected to a seat in the House of Commons entirely irrespective of the place where he lives. A Hindoo from Patna, a Dyak from the jungles of Borneo might be elected to sit in the House of Commons. The large majority of members do not live in the constituencies they represent. Imagine any native of India with exceptional intellectual powers—suppose him to come to England and be elected to the House of Commons, and suppose him to distinguish himself there, and to become the leader of one of the great English parties—he might legally become Prime Minister of England, and thus the most important subject in the British Empire. So far as the law

goes, we debar no one, no matter what his race or religion, from the highest post to which his talents can raise him.

We, also, ladies and gentlemen, make no difference in any of our colonies as regards religion. At one time some little pressure was exerted to favor Christianity, but such a line of policy was abandoned. It was perceived that it is not by force that Christianity ought to be spread, and it was felt to be a breach of the principle of absolute religious equality. To bring pressure to bear on the part of the government in its support would not really benefit religion. Accordingly, we observe a strict religious neutrality, and do not interfere in any way with the exercise of any native religion, so long as the practices of that religion are not inconsistent with humanity and the fundamental principles of morality. Of course, when that is the case it becomes necessary to interfere. In India, for instance, there was a custom that the Hindoo widow should burn herself upon the funeral pyre of her husband. This was very common and though not absolutely dictated by the doctrine, it was considered a highly meritorious act, and the English, when they first went to India, were usually told that the widows themselves liked it. That argument, however, did not prevent our putting an end to it, and this practice of suttee has been entirely forbidden in India. We do not even allow it in any of the states under our protection, and the enlightened intelligence of the Hindoos has long approved of its being stopped.

We have also preserved everywhere the native laws. Of course, we enforce no native law or custom obviously opposed to reason and justice, but otherwise we uphold and maintain the native system. It is deemed to be only fair to the natives that they should be allowed to observe the legal customs they prefer, so the Hindoo and the Mohammedan laws of inheritance are allowed to subsist, and you have the spectacle of the British Privy Council, which is the Supreme Court of Appeal for India and the Colonies, hearing and deciding questions upon Hindoo and Mohammedan law, in which the sentences of the Koran and the dicta contained in the Institutes of Manu are cited to an English court. The practice of recognizing the native customs and usages in the colonies and in India has been found to give contentment and satisfaction, and I think has been justified by its results.

One of the chief difficulties which English administrators have experienced has been the protection of the natives. When a European goes out as a trader he is liable to be tempted, abusing his superior strength and intelligence, to deal harshly or unfairly with the natives, and, therefore, it is held to be a primary duty of all colonial officials to give all protection and security to the natives. Everyone who represents the British government is bound to see that the rights of natives are scrupulously safeguarded, and that nothing is done to injure them or wound their feelings. That is sometimes pretty hard to secure, because sometimes when a European, though not naturally an unkindly man, finds himself in the midst of a weaker population, he is likely to take advantage of his strength, but we have regarded it as our duty, since Providence has placed us in control of these nations, to see that the natives are justly treated.

We levy no tribute upon the colonies. Their revenues are applied entirely to the support of the colonial administration and public works. It is a long time since any income was received from India.

People enter the colonial service by examination as to fitness. No one is appointed or dismissed on political grounds. (Applause.) Promotion in the service itself is given upon the ground of ability and proved diligence in the discharge of duty. The only exceptions to that rule are to be found in some of the higher posts. The Governor-General of India and the Governors of Madras and Bombay are selected from home, and very often eminent men who have distinguished themselves in home politics are appointed to these posts. Sometimes, to very important posts, such as the governorship of Australia, someone is sent out from home who is not part of the colonial service, but those are the exceptions. On the whole, we get a very good class of men. Of course, in the Crown colonies and India the great bulk of the administration is carried on by the natives. Only the highest posts are reserved for Europeans.

I think I have now enumerated the main principles by which our colonial policy is governed. It remains only to say that although we do encounter difficulties; although, of course, the conditions of race which exist do sometimes give rise to disturbances

and troubles (we sometimes find it pretty hard to keep peace between Hindoos and Musselmans); though difficulties of this kind must continually occur where we have to deal with half-civilized or savage populations, still, on the whole, under this system, the outlines of which I have endeavored to draw, the prosperity of most of the Crown colonies and the tranquillity of all has been steadily increasing. Order has been established, and to-day the law is obeyed and tranquillity reigns in most of these colonies, even where the inhabitants are uncivilized. I remember with how much astonishment I found, in traveling through India, that I was able to go alone, unaccompanied by any European, through forests, over mountains, and along the borders of independent states, absolutely unguarded. When, on starting, I asked a friend whether it was necessary to take firearms with me, I was told that it was unnecessary, that the prestige of the British name would carry me safely through any journey, however long the journey, which I might take, and however wild the country. That is the best testimony to the perfect order which has been established in India. The same is true of nearly all of the Crown colonies. When, from time to time, a disturbance arises, the system of police we have established is so efficient that we can quickly suppress a riot or sedition. The government has done its best to develop the resources of the colonies, to spread education, and to accustom the native peoples to the habits of civilization. Civilization has no doubt two sides, and there are, unfortunately, certain evils which accompany the benefits civilization carries with it. That, I fear, it is impossible to avoid entirely, but, still, when we look at the general results, we are able, after the century and a half during which we have been holding these countries and endeavoring to administer them, to feel that great steps forward have been taken, and that the condition of the subject races is, on the whole, far better now, and contains far more of promise for the future than it has at any previous period of our history.